

This Week in Congress

January 22, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Kansas Counties Suffer more than \$360 Million in Damages from Winter Storm

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) this week informed me that FEMA and the Kansas Adjutant General's office have completed the preliminary damage assessment for the 44 western Kansas counties affected by the late December winter storm. The estimated damage to public infrastructure exceeds more than \$360 million.

On January 7, President Bush signed a presidential disaster declaration for the State of Kansas and made federal funds available for recovery efforts in affected communities. The numbers released this week mean Kansas counties should be eligible for all categories of public assistance, including debris removal, emergency protective measures, road systems and bridges, water control facilities, public buildings and contents, public utilities, and parks and recreational facilities. More than \$350 million accounts for damage to public utilities alone, mainly power lines. I am also continuing to work with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Mike Johanns to obtain assistance from USDA for farmers and ranchers.

[Click here](#) to listen to an audio file I recorded and to see the full list of designated Kansas counties.

Sponsoring Legislation to Bring Disaster Assistance Home to Kansas Producers

Kansans have not only suffered through a damaging winter storm, but are also trying to recover from the effects of multiple year droughts. The FEMA assistance for the recent winter storm is good news for our public entities. In a continued effort to assist our agriculture producers, this week I sponsored agricultural disaster assistance legislation to aid farmers and ranchers suffering from the effects of these natural disasters. The legislation would cover losses incurred in 2005, 2006 or 2007. This will not only help with the aftermath of the winter storm, but also with losses incurred from the drought conditions of the last two summers.

Introducing Legislation to Revoke Pensions for Convicted Lawmakers

This week, I introduced legislation with the Kansas delegation to take away congressional pensions from Members of Congress who commit crimes during their time in office. This legislation would strip pensions from lawmakers convicted of a felony, such as bribery, defrauding government and lying under oath. This legislation will help restore public trust and hold officials accountable for their actions. The House will be voting on this measure later today.

Democrats' First 100 Hours Comes to a Close

In December, Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced a list of initiatives the House would consider during the first 100 hours of this Congress. I had requested that agriculture disaster assistance be addressed in this timeframe. This week, the Democrats concluded their First 100 Hours agenda and I am disappointed that disaster assistance still has not been addressed. I will continue working with the House Agriculture Committee and the new leadership to see that this is made a priority in the coming days. On Wednesday, the House passed legislation that will cut the student loan interest rate in half over the next five years. Also passed this week was legislation strengthening the oversight of the House Page Program.

Discussing Iran with New York Times Columnist, Tom Friedman

I attended a meeting of the Iran Working Group this week that featured Tom Friedman, columnist with the New York Times and author of *The World is Flat*. Mr. Friedman talked about the diversity of ideas and thoughts of the Iranian people. We also discussed Iran's role in terms of Iraq and the Middle East.

Attending the Simpson Farm Enterprises Open House in Hays

On Monday, I spent the afternoon with a couple hundred farmers and ranchers from the Hay area at the Simpson Farm Enterprises Open House. Simpson Farm Enterprises, an agricultural spraying machinery and parts dealership, is owned by Jed and Jay Simpson. It is great to see young people like Jed and Jay operating businesses in our rural communities. I appreciated the invitation to this event and enjoyed the afternoon.

Listening Tour Continues: New Stops Added for This Week

I spent time this week in Chapman and McFarland. Today, I visited Grandview Plaza in Geary County. I have completed 45 of my 69 town hall meetings. On Thursday, I will be in Seneca in Nemaha County, Blue Rapids in Marshall County and Linn in Washington County.----- Click here to view times and locations and to view other tour stops still being scheduled.

In the Office

Rob Freeman of Lenexa was in the office this week with TradeWind Energy to discuss wind energy. Bob Parkerson of Overland Park was in with National Crop Insurance Services to talk about crop insurance programs. Paul Davidson of Kansas City, who serves as the Executive Director of the National Gulf War Resource Center, was in to discuss the treatment of Gulf War and other veterans suffering from undiagnosed illnesses and caring for veterans returning from current conflicts overseas.

Judi O'Grady of Eudora was in with Cure Search to talk about the importance of childhood cancer research and funding priorities for 2007. Jon Callen of Wichita and Ed Cross of Topeka were in with the Kansas Independent Oil and Gas Association to introduce themselves. Sue Peterson and Chuck Reagan of Manhattan were also in this week representing Kansas State University.

In my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol were Kathy Sanders-Sweet of

Colby with her children, Laura and Patrick Sweet.

Very truly yours,

Jerry